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Child's Pique Dress

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The Ladies' Paradise takes its readers to the late nineteenth century when the development of department stores was revolutionizing business in Paris. Zola uses great detail in describing the departments, business tactics and social life within the Ladies' Paradise. He also describes two large sales held by the store, the second of which is the "White Sale," where the Paradise took all of their white garments and displayed them to be sold at a discounted price. A white piqué child's coat found in the University of Rhode Island Textile Collection is similar to what would have been sold in Denise's department during the sale.

Zola describes the sale: **"The department had brought out all its white articles, and there, as everywhere else, was a riot of white, enough to dress in white a troop of shivering cupids, white cloth cloaks, white piqués and cashmere dresses, sailor costumes and even white Zouave costumes."**¹ The white piqué child's coat circa 1870, seen in Figure 1, had machine stitching and could possibly have been bought



ready-made.² It was donated in 1962 and described as an American child's coat or dress with its original buttons missing, which may have been either a boy's or girl's, purchased from Maker's Antique Shop in South Dennis, Cape Cod.³

The garment measures twenty-one inches in length and has a waist of twenty-two inches. Five rows of tab enclosures run vertically down the front with a belt of the same material and the same style. A hook and eye is attached to each tab enclosure to close this garment in the front. Mother of pearl buttons, dated to the 1880s with the help of the URI button collection, had been attached to the garment after it was purchased. The original buttons were missing as described. This garment is white and made of cotton fibers with eight pieces of fabric that run the length of the garment which are sewn together piece by piece with machine sewn stitches. Long lappets run down the front and back of the garment on either side as a decoration. A button is attached at the bottom of each lappet. The white cotton piqué pattern is that of diagonal lines and boxes. The word piqué comes from the French word meaning quilted because the raised effect in the fabrics is similar to that of quilts. White cotton piqués in imitation of hand quilting were woven on the loom from the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Uses for piqué included infants' coats, carriage robes for summer, cravats, trimmings, skirts, vests, and dresses. Men's dress clothes, including white ties, vests and stiff bosomed shirts, are made of piqué.⁴

Ready-made clothing was a growing industry from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Clothes were sold in the new, large department stores that were established in London, France and large towns everywhere during the nineteenth century.⁵ *The Ladies' Paradise* is based on one of these department stores, Le Bon Marché. Many had a separate department for the children's clothes as well as workrooms where ready-made items were made, which was described in *The Ladies' Paradise* in detail.

Ready-made clothes were sold in the new, large department stores and many had a separate department for the children's clothes, just like the one found in the Ladies' Paradise. This dress is an example of what may have been sold in Denise's department during the "White Sale" as described by Zola.

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1. Emile Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*, (Digireads.com Publishing, 2011): 613.
 2. *White Pique Coat ca. 1870*. Accession number 62.99.28. URI Textile Collection, 1962.
 3. Accession Note, Folder 1962. University of Rhode Island Textile Collection.
 4. Florence M. Montgomery, *Textiles in America 1650–1870*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984).
 5. Anne Buck, *Clothes and the Child: A Handbook of Children's Dress in England 1500-1900*, (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers Inc., 1996): 251–252.